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Origins of Sino-Japanese Hostilities

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Origins of Sino-Japanese Hostilities

BY T. A. BISSON

with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association

This report is based on the first chapter in Mr. Bisson's book, entitled "Japan in China," to be published this spring by the Macmillan Company.

IN the early months of 1937, immediately prior to the Lukouchiao incident, China was rapidly achieving effective political unity. The groundwork for this development had been laid by the revival of a vigorous nationalist movement, which had found initial expression in the student demonstrations of December 1935. During the ensuing year this new-found nationalism had embraced broad sections of the population, the most active of which were organized in various units of the National Salvation Association. At the forefront of its program the nationalist movement placed two basic demands: cessation of civil war and firm resistance to Japanese aggression. During 1936 the public opinion thus aroused began to exert powerful influence on the actions of the Nanking authorities and other Chinese military and political leaders.

With the outbreak of the Kwangtung-Kwangsi revolt in June 1936, a large-scale civil war seemed unavoidable. Public opinion not only condemned the Southwest leaders as rebels, but ranged itself equally against recourse to a "punitive expedition" by the central government. Both sides hesitated to assume the onus of provoking civil war, and the crisis was peacefully resolved. General Chen Chitang, military dictator of Kwangtung province, was deserted by several of his high commanders and by his air force. In July he fled to Hongkong, and the Nanking government established its authority over Kwangtung. Two months later the central authorities effected a compromise settlement with the leaders of Kwangsi province, Generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi. The two latter retained control in Kwangsi, but under terms which brought them into closer and more cooperative relations with the Nanking government. These results marked a notable milestone in China's progress toward political integration.

Following the settlement with Kwangsi in September, the central authorities were immediately forced to deal with a series of demands presented at Nanking by Shigeru Kawagoe, the Japanese Ambassador. These demands were ostensibly based on incidents at Chengtu and Pakhoi, in the course of which several Japanese nationals had lost their lives. Japan's terms, which required political concessions so far-reaching as to recall the Twenty-one Demands of 1915, greatly exceeded the scope of legitimate reparation. The Nanking authorities displayed an unwonted firmness, and little progress was made in the negotiations held during October and November between General Chang Chun, the Chinese Foreign Minister, and Ambassador Kawagoe. Early in December, after Suiyuan province had been invaded by Japanese-sponsored Mongol and Chinese forces, the Chinese government broke off the conversations with Japan.

On the other hand, the Nanking government rendered no effective assistance to the Suiyuan defenders. Nanking's arrest of the seven leaders of the National Salvation Association at Shanghai in November, moreover, suggested that it was heeding Kawagoe's demand for suppression of the anti-Japanese movement. No less significant was the evidence which accumulated during November that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was preparing to launch another general anti-Communist campaign. The central military authorities concentrated vast supplies of munitions and the bulk of its air force, not in Suiyuan, but at Loyang on the eastern border of Shensi province. In conferences with General Chang Hsueh-liang, whose former Manchurian troops were charged with the task of "bandit suppression," the Generalissimo insisted that the time had come to complete the extermination of the Communists. Only on this basis, he argued, could national unity be consolidated and resistance to Japan made possible. It was clear that, in the mind of the Generalissimo, the popular demand for an end to civil strife should not include surcease to warfare with the

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Communists, on which Nanking had squandered enormous resources without achieving success.

Chiang's adherence to this fixed idea was to usher in the most crucial phase of China's recent political evolution. The approaching drama found its setting in the northwestern provinces of Shensi and Kansu. Completing their "Long March" of six thousand miles from Kiangsi via Szechuan,¹ the last detachments of the Chinese Communist armies had entered Shensi in the autumn of 1936 and joined forces with the units which had preceded them. Some months earlier a *sub rosa* truce had been established between General Chang Hsueh-liang, Vice-Commander of the Bandit-Suppression Forces, and the Communist leaders in northern Shensi.² Chang Hsueh-liang's initial efforts to fight the Red armies had ended in disaster, with several of his *Tungpei*³ divisions deserting to the Communists. Some of these men had returned to Chang Hsueh-liang's headquarters at Sian, capital of Shensi, with enthusiastic reports of the discipline, morale and anti-Japanese sentiments of the Red commanders and troops. Gradually Chang Hsueh-liang had become convinced that the Communist leaders were sincere in urging the cessation of fighting between Chinese groups and a united front against Japanese aggression. His own *Tungpei* troops, some 130,000 strong, were eager to give up the struggle against the Communists and devote their energies to the fight "back to their homeland." This spirit burned fiercest among a group of Chang Hsueh-liang's younger officers. It was also shared by the 40,000 Northwestern troops commanded by General Yang Hu-chen, which were supposed to be assisting in the fight against the Reds. By the autumn of 1936 a quasi-alliance had been formed between Chang Hsueh-liang, Yang Hu-chen and the Communist leaders. With Chang's approval and support, a branch of the National Salvation Association had been organized at Sian, and the patriotic movement—elsewhere partly or wholly suppressed—was openly propagating its views in Shensi and Kansu provinces.

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was not unaware of these developments. Chang Hsueh-liang had frankly advised him to abandon the struggle against the Communists and accept their united

1. Cf. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York, Random House, 1938).

2. For a detailed analysis of the Sian affair, cf. James M. Bertram, *First Act in China* (New York, The Viking Press, 1938); also Snow, *Red Star Over China*, cited, part twelve, chapters 1-5.

3. *Tungpei*, i.e., Northeastern, from the Northeastern provinces or Manchuria, is the name by which Chang Hsueh-liang's troops are known all over China. The word is pronounced "doong-bay."

front offers. During the Suiyuan invasion, Chang had virtually demanded that his *Tungpei* troops be sent to fight against the Japanese in the north. Chiang Kai-shek chose to disregard this advice and these requests, and made preparations to inaugurate a renewed anti-Communist campaign. In October, General Hu Tsung-nan, a trusted commander, was sent into Kansu with Chiang's crack First Army. One month later a unit of the Red Army severely handled Hu Tsung-nan's force, which beat a hurried retreat. Still the Generalissimo persisted. On December 7, 1936, accompanied by his bodyguard, his staff and certain other Chinese military commanders, he arrived at Sian. Brushing aside the protests of Chang Hsueh-liang and his officers, the Generalissimo stated that the anti-Communist campaign was to be inaugurated on December 12. Unless Chang Hsueh-liang accepted this ultimatum, he was to be superseded by General Chiang Ting-wen, one of the commanders in the Generalissimo's entourage. Early on the morning of December 12 units of Chang Hsueh-liang's troops surrounded and captured the Generalissimo, his staff, and his associate officers.

The details of the negotiations which followed at Sian have never been fully revealed, although the result is plain. After some hesitancy, overcome partly by the efforts of certain groups at Nanking to send a "punitive" expedition into Shensi without regard for his safety, Chiang Kai-shek for the first time entered into a serious discussion with Chang Hsueh-liang regarding the political issues at stake. Chou En-lai, one of the chief Communist leaders, participated in these conversations.⁴ He made it clear to Chiang that the Communists were unwilling to exploit the situation on the narrow plane of partisan advantage. Had they so chosen, they might have united with Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-chen to form a powerful northwestern army for the overthrow of the Nanking régime, utilizing Chiang as a hostage. They told the Generalissimo, however, that they desired him to return to Nanking, establish nation-wide political unity embracing the Red armies, and make preparations for resistance to Japan.⁵ The efforts of Chou En-lai and other Communist representatives at Sian to prevent the hot-headed *Tungpei* officers from staging a mass trial of the Generalissimo, which would almost certainly have resulted in a death sentence, convincingly underlined the

4. No mention of Chiang's talks with Chou appear in the former's published diary of his sojourn in Sian. The omission is natural, since it would have intensified the suspicions of conservatives in Nanking and in Japan.

5. Interview by the author at Yenan, June 1937.

sincerity of their proposals. When Chiang Kai-shek was released on Christmas Day to fly back to Nanking, the Communist leaders believed that he had given up the "unity by force" theory. Chang Hsueh-liang also felt satisfied on this point, and returned to Nanking with the Generalissimo.

During the early months of 1937 there were times when this confidence seemed misplaced, at least to the outside observer. In reality, Chiang Kai-shek seems to have skilfully maneuvered to secure acceptance of the united front program by the conservatives at Nanking. The Kuomintang plenary session of February ostensibly rejected the points of a united front offer telegraphed to Nanking by the Red leaders, but the counter-proposals laid down by the Kuomintang afforded grounds for negotiations which began in March. By June an agreement had been reached which, while leaving the Communist forces in control of their Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia areas, brought them under centralized military direction and assured them of partial financial support from Nanking.

China's political integration was meanwhile progressing in other spheres. The *Tungpei* troops had been transferred to Honan and Anhwei provinces and placed under the direction of a military committee which included Chang Hsueh-liang's commanders and representatives of the central government. During June they underwent a general reorganization which assimilated them to the national military forces. A similar process was under way in Szechuan. For a brief period in May, the possibility of civil war again reared its head when the Nanking government demanded that Szechuan's motley forces, aggregating at least 200,000 men, accept centralized control. The influence which Nanking was now able to mobilize, backed as it was in this case by the nationalist movement, proved too great for the local Szechuan warlords to withstand and they bowed to the inevitable. During July and August, a military committee of the local and national commanders reorganized the Szechuan forces, and brought them under effective command of the central government.

Little more than a year had elapsed since the Kwangtung-Kwangsi revolt. In this period the Nanking authorities had successively established their control in Kwangtung, come to an agreement with the Kwangsi leaders, reorganized and brought under central control the *Tungpei* armies and the Szechuan troops, and negotiated a united front with the Red commanders. Chinese political unity, which had remained a myth since the founding of the Republic in 1911, was in a fair way to being accomplished. This progress necessarily affected the attitudes of Generals Yen Hsi-

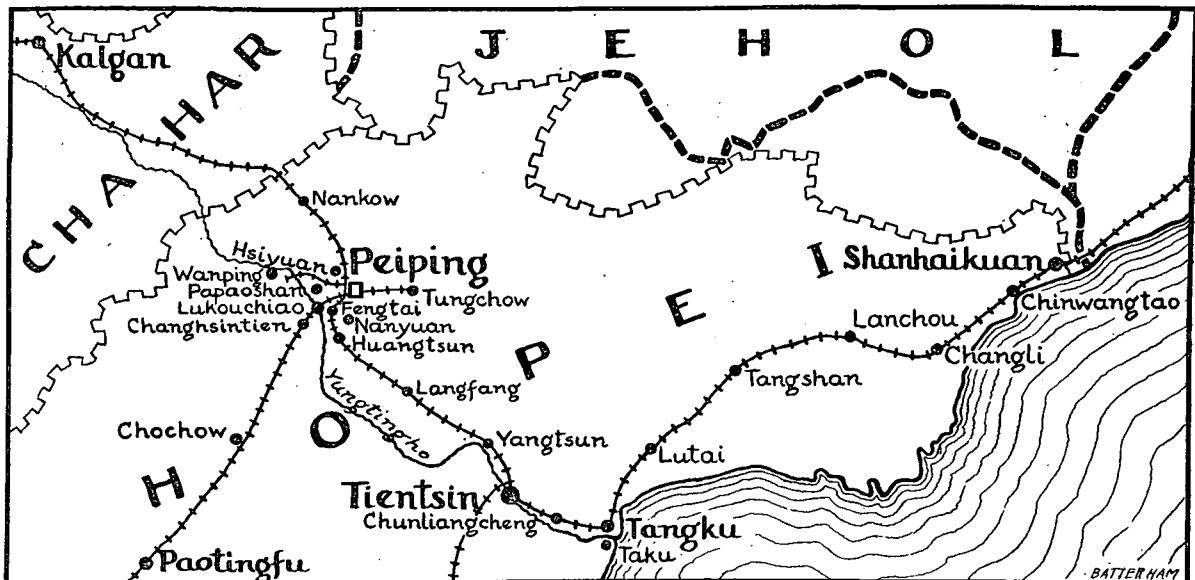
shan, Fu Tso-yi, Sung Che-yuan, and Han Fu-chu, commanders of Shansi, Suiyuan, Hopei and Shantung provinces—the area of immediate Japanese penetration. Each of these leaders felt the centripetal pull, and they now came to accept more direct and effective military-political control from Nanking. The "autonomy" which Japan had been attempting to foster in the north was yielding to the more subtle and pervasive influences emanating from China's central government.

THE LUKOUCHIAO INCIDENT

In North China, during the spring of 1937, disturbing political undercurrents partially belied the surface calm in Sino-Japanese relations. Mutinies among the pro-Manchoukuo irregulars controlling north Chahar, and the activities of armed Chinese volunteers, were raising a barrier against further Japanese encroachment on the Inner Mongolian provinces. The leaders of the Hopei-Chahar Political Council were proving hesitant about carrying through a series of economic projects involving the exploitation of North China under Japanese auspices. On May 11 General Sung Che-yuan, chairman of the Council and commander of the 29th Army, went into a prolonged retreat at Loling, his birthplace in northern Shantung. It was rumored that his continued retirement was due to a desire to avoid Japanese pressure. To the Japanese military, it seemed that the Hopei-Chahar Political Council was becoming something less than a pliant tool through which Japan's purposes in North China could be accomplished.

The members of the Hopei-Chahar Political Council, some two dozen in number, were not all of one mind. Many of them had been chosen by Nanking for their recognized pro-Japanese orientation. None of them, however, was wholly immune to the national consciousness that was spreading over China; some were strongly affected by it. The important leaders of the Council were commanding officers of the 29th Route Army, and also held the chief government posts in the two provinces. In the spring of 1937 the four divisions⁶ of the 29th Army and several other attached brigades probably exceeded 100,000 troops, although less than half of these were in the Peiping-Tientsin area. Several thousand *Paoantui* (Peace Preservation Corps), well armed but used mainly for policing purposes, were also under the jurisdiction of the Hopei-Chahar Political Council. Eight

6. The 37th, General Feng Chih-an, governor of Hopei; the 38th, General Chang Tzu-chung, Mayor of Tientsin; the 132nd, General Chao Teng-yu; the 143rd, General Liu Ju-ming, governor of Chahar.



Japanese civilian advisers were attached to the Council, and three Japanese military advisers to the 29th Army.

During the spring the underlying uneasiness in the north never took on tangible form. A change of atmosphere occurred at the end of June. Rumors of an impending upset began to fill the air, and were multiplied during the first week of July. The correspondents were alert to know when the Japanese were "going to strike." The following *Reuter* dispatch shows that this state of mind was not without reason:

"Peiping, June 30. Precautionary measures have been strengthened by the local defence authorities during the last two days as the result of rumors that plain clothes men have smuggled themselves into the city for the purpose of creating disturbances. Semi-martial law was enforced on Monday and Tuesday nights when pedestrians were subject to search. It is reported that four suspicious characters were arrested at the Chien Men Station on Monday night and that they have confessed that they are in the pay of a certain disgruntled politician. The continuance of field exercises by Japanese troops at Marco Polo Bridge and vicinity has given rise to considerable anxiety in Chinese circles. It is stated that at first the Chinese authorities were given to understand that these exercises would last only one day, but they have since continued for three days."⁷

Two possible sources of future trouble are noted in this dispatch: the activities of plain clothes men, and Japanese troop maneuvers at Marco Polo Bridge. Throughout the first week of July, the North China officials were forced to deal with a continuous incursion of plain clothes agents.⁸ If

7. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 1, 1937.

8. *The Peiping Chronicle*, *The Peiping News*, July 2-7, 1937.

these agents had planned to create disturbances that would serve as a pretext for Japanese intervention, their object was frustrated by the determined actions of the North China officials. Escape from this danger did not prevent the outbreak of conflict. The exact details of the Lukouchiao, or Marco Polo Bridge, incident will probably never be known. As at Mukden on September 18, 1931, the event which gave rise to the armed clash took place under cover of darkness, and contradictory versions as to what actually happened were immediately put into circulation.

According to the Japanese version,⁹ Chinese soldiers about 1,000 metres north of Lukouchiao fired several tons of rifle shots, some time before midnight on July 7, at a body of Japanese troops holding maneuvers in that vicinity. The maneuvers were immediately halted and the troops concentrated to watch developments. With only one live cartridge for each soldier in his force, the Japanese commander was obliged to hold fire and summon reinforcements from Fengtai. Meanwhile, arrangements were made for a joint Sino-Japanese investigation committee to be dispatched to the scene from Peiping. This committee reached the spot between four and five o'clock in the morning of July 8. The Japanese reinforcements reached Lukouchiao at five o'clock in the morning; about half-past five, in consequence of renewed firing by the Chinese troops, fighting was resumed and lasted until half-past nine, when a temporary truce was effected.

The official Chinese version¹⁰ claims that shortly

9. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 9, 1937; *The Japan Advertiser*, July 9 and 10, 1937.

10. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 9, 1937.

after midnight Colonel Matsui, chief of the Japanese Special Service Mission at Peiping, telephoned to the Hopei-Chahar Political Council, stating that while a company of Japanese troops was engaged in field maneuvers near Lukouchiao rifle shots were suddenly heard.¹¹ The exercises were then stopped, declared Colonel Matsui, the number of men checked, and one man found to be missing. He concluded by saying that the Japanese had demanded the right to enter Wanping to search for the missing soldier, but that this demand had been rejected. Later Colonel Matsui again telephoned the Council, saying that the Japanese troops would enter Wanping by force unless permission for entry was granted. Hoping to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, the Council authorities agreed to have a joint delegation sent to the scene. These delegates reached Wanping at four o'clock on the morning of July 8. The Japanese officers on the spot again insisted that their troops be permitted to enter and search the town, but the Chinese officials declined to entertain the demand. The delegates entered the town, however, and about five o'clock, while negotiations for a settlement were proceeding, the Japanese troops outside the east gate opened fire. Up to this point the Chinese troops had not replied to the attack, but they were now compelled to open fire in self-defense.

The fighting at Wanping ended at half-past nine on the morning of July 8, with several score Chinese soldiers and about ten Chinese civilians killed or wounded; Japanese casualties were officially announced as ten, including two non-commissioned officers and one sub-lieutenant. A one-hour armistice was declared at ten o'clock, later extended to noon—the first of several truces made only to be broken on this and subsequent days.

Several aspects of the Lukouchiao incident deserve further consideration. In the first place, as noted in the *Reuter* dispatch quoted previously, the Japanese troop maneuvers at Marco Polo Bridge had already been proceeding for three days as early as June 30. Yet field exercises were still continuing there on the night of July 7, when the incident occurred. What made it necessary for the Japanese maneuvers to be prolonged over a ten-day period? In the second place, the Lukouchiao-Wanping area is of extreme strategic importance. This region lies athwart the Peiping-Hankow

11. Chinese newspaper reports suggested that these shots might have been fired by plain clothes men under Japanese direction. There are indications that certain "young officers" planned the whole affair in emulation of the Mukden incident of September 18, 1931. The names usually mentioned include Major-General Torashiro Kawabe, Lieut.-Col. Wachi, and Colonel Matsui. Cf. *China Weekly Review*, July 31, 1937, p. 324.

Railway which, in view of the Japanese occupation of the Fengtai railway junction in September 1936, afforded the last unobstructed access to Peiping from the south for Chinese troops. Could the Japanese army have been designedly aiming to secure military control of Lukouchiao and Wanping, thus completing the isolation of Peiping?

There is, finally, the technical point that the Japanese military forces had no legal justification for conducting maneuvers in the Lukouchiao area. Since the Japanese authorities, on a number of occasions in recent years, have referred rather loosely to the Boxer Protocol as justifying the exercise of certain military rights in North China which they have in fact arbitrarily assumed, it is necessary to examine at some length the relevant sections of this protocol and the later exchanges of notes between China and the powers. Article IX of the Final Protocol, signed on September 7, 1901 and commonly known as the Boxer Protocol, reads as follows:

"The Chinese Government has conceded the right to the Powers in the protocol annexed to the letter of the 16th of January, 1901, to occupy certain points, to be determined by an agreement between them, for the maintenance of open communications between the capital and the sea. The points occupied by the powers are: Huangtsun, Langfang, Yangtsun, Tientsin, Chunliangcheng, Tangku, Lutai, Tangshan, Lanchou, Changli, Chinwangtao and Shanhakuan."¹²

This Article permits the occupation of only twelve specified points. In actual practice, up to 1933, all the powers including Japan had restricted their troops to Peiping and Tientsin, except for small contingents dispatched in rotation to summer camps at Chinwangtao and Shanhakuan. Only Japan, since 1933, had exercised the right of stationing troops at most of the twelve places specified in Article IX. In addition, from the end of 1935 Japan arbitrarily assumed the right to station a military force at Tungchow, and from September 1936 at Fengtai. The maintenance of Japanese troops at these two towns was clearly contrary to the provisions of the Boxer Protocol.

During the first week of July 1937, the issue at Lukouchiao was not one of military occupation but whether Japan had treaty sanction for holding troop maneuvers in that area. The provisions relating to this question are found in the identical notes addressed to China by five powers, including Japan, under date of July 15, 1902, and are supplementary to Article IX of the Boxer Protocol. They read as follows:

12. John V. A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements with and concerning China, 1894-1919* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1921), Volume I, pp. 282-83.

"By Article IX of the same Protocol it is provided that the powers shall have the right of occupying certain points between Peking and the sea, of which the whole town of Tientsin is one. Consequently, after the dissolution of the Tientsin provisional government, foreign troops will continue as hitherto to be stationed there, in the places actually occupied by them, and their supplies of all sorts continuing, as at present, to be exempt from all taxes or dues whatsoever. They will have the right of carrying on field exercises and rifle practice, etc., without informing the Chinese authorities, except in the case of *feux de guerre*.

"It is desirable, however, to avoid as far as possible occasions of collision between the foreign troops and those of China. I propose, therefore, that with this object the Chinese Government shall undertake not to station or march any troops within 20 Chinese *li* (6½ English miles) of the city or of the troops stationed at Tientsin; further . . . it was agreed that the jurisdiction of the commanders of the posts to be established along the line of communications should extend to a distance of 2 miles on either side of the railway, and this arrangement ought to be maintained as long as the line of posts specified in Article IX of the protocol continued to be occupied."¹³

These provisions confined the right to carry on "field exercises and rifle practice, etc." exclusively to the foreign troops stationed in Tientsin, and within clearly specified areas. The article of the main protocol which sanctioned the maintenance of Legation Guards in Peiping did not provide for their deployment beyond the limits of the Legation Quarter. By a later arrangement, the various Legation Guards secured the privilege of using an international rifle range which was laid out to the east of Peiping.¹⁴ This privilege, however, did not carry with it the right to hold troop maneuvers in the neighborhood of Peiping. Yet the Japanese military forces, from 1935 to 1937, arbitrarily assumed the right to conduct field exercises on an extended scale throughout the Peiping-Tientsin area. It was by virtue of this assumed right, wholly unsanctioned by treaty provision, that the Japanese troops were holding maneuvers at Lukouchiao in July 1937.¹⁵

INITIAL REACTIONS

Following the Lukouchiao incident, events in North China—with deceptive interludes of calm—marched to the appointed climax of July 28. Early

13. *Ibid.*, Volume 1, p. 317.

14. "The Documents in the Case," *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 27, 1937.

15. Some authorities refer to a note of November 15, 1913, sent to the powers by the Chinese Foreign Minister, as conferring such a right. The exact degree of validity to be attached to this note is in doubt.

on the morning of July 9, the War Office at Tokyo sent urgent orders to the commanders of certain divisions in Japan to postpone disbandment of privates whose service terms were expiring. Even more significant measures were taken by the Japanese government on July 11.¹⁶ Consular officials in China were ordered to instruct Japanese nationals to prepare for evacuation "in the event of serious developments." The Foreign Office announced that the Cabinet had decided "to take all necessary measures for dispatching military forces to North China." At a specially summoned meeting of Japan's political and financial notables, the Premier explained the government's policy and elicited pledges of support. On the same day 2,200 Japanese troops arrived in Tientsin from Manchuria. On July 11, also, the first settlement of the Lukouchiao incident was reached. General Chang Tzu-chung, Mayor of Tientsin, provisionally accepted the following terms: apology by a representative of the 29th Army, and punishment of responsible Chinese officers; replacement of the 29th Army troops in the Lukouchiao-Wanping area with *Paoantui* units; and suppression of anti-Japanese and Communist activities in North China.

Throughout the period of crisis, a sharp internal struggle was taking place among the highest ranks of the North China officials. The compromisers were mainly located in Tientsin; at Peiping, a more militant mood prevailed. Strongest of all was the feeling among the lower Chinese officers and the private soldiers, who were especially determined that the Lukouchiao-Wanping area should not be turned over to occupation by Japanese troops, as had occurred at Fengtai in the previous September. On the other hand, the Japanese forces in the Lukouchiao area were at no time wholly withdrawn to Fengtai—a factor which led to continued skirmishing, since the 29th Army troops were unwilling, under such circumstances, to retire in favor of the *Paoantui* units. The position of the Chinese officials, who were at the same time responsible military commanders, was most unenviable. In line with official policy, sanctioned by Nanking, they sought to avoid a frontal clash by complying so far as possible with the Japanese demands. In contrast with previous years, however, their yielding stopped short of an outright surrender of national rights, and thus failed to satisfy the requirements of determined Japanese aggression. The corollary to this policy, which should have been definite, planned resistance on the military side in case of a showdown, was never drawn.

Despite the agreement of July 11, Japanese mili-

16. *The Japan Advertiser*, July 12, 1937.

tary reinforcements continued to pour into North China. Foreign military observers estimated that 10,000 Japanese troops had crossed the Great Wall by July 13 and occupied positions between Shantiaokuan and Tientsin. The majority of these troops, which lacked the distinctive badge of the Kwantung Army, had evidently been mobilized in Japan. During the succeeding week the bulk of this force was disposed at various points in the Peiping-Tientsin area, thus doubling the local Japanese garrison. A new commander of the North China Garrison, Lieutenant-General Katsuki, had arrived in Tientsin and assumed office by July 14.¹⁷ On arrival, he had declared that his "mission in North China was to lead the Japanese army to justice and righteousness and to chastise the outrageous Chinese, and simultaneously to protect Japanese residents and Japanese rights and interests in North China on the basis of the immutable decisions adopted by the Cabinet."¹⁸

General Sung Che-yuan had meanwhile broken off his two months' retreat at Leling and reappeared in Tientsin. On July 18 he called upon Lieutenant-General Katsuki and accepted in principle the terms of the July 11 agreement. This action was reported to Nanking on July 22 and approved by the central government on July 24.¹⁹ Meanwhile General Chang Tzu-chung, Mayor of Tientsin, had discussed further details with the Japanese on July 19. Fulfilment began on July 21, when a detachment of the Peace Preservation Corps arrived at Lukouchiao. During the next two days both Chinese and Japanese troops began a gradual withdrawal from this area, with the former being replaced by Paoantui units. Three Chinese and three Japanese representatives supervised the withdrawal. Simultaneously the Chinese garrison in Peiping, comprising a section of the 37th Division, was retiring south to Chochow. Two thousand men were estimated to have left Peiping by July 23; they were replaced by contingents of General Chao Teng-yu's 132nd Division.

The tension in North China had considerably eased by July 25. Sandbag barricades had been removed from the streets of Peiping; martial law, still nominally in force, had been greatly relaxed. For the first time since July 7 passenger trains were reaching Peiping from the south along the Ping-Han line. Other aspects were less reassuring. Relatively few Japanese troops had withdrawn

from the Lukouchiao area, and these for but a short distance. The 29th Army troops were also slowing down their retirement, while an uninterrupted stream of Japanese troops and equipment was still pouring into North China. On July 25 the first of a fleet of Japanese ships began to unload 100,000 tons of military supplies at Tangku. That night another incident, occurring at Langfang, proved to be the signal for the outbreak of general hostilities.

DEVELOPMENTS AT NANKING

During these weeks, the central authorities at Nanking cautiously watched developments in the north. Routine protests and reservations of rights were exchanged with the Japanese government between July 9 and 12. The Chinese government, from the beginning, was mainly concerned over the influx of Japanese troops. As a counter-measure, several Chinese divisions were mobilized in Honan and later sent into southern Hopei. Dr. Wang Chung-hui, Chinese Foreign Minister, proposed on July 12 to Mr. Hidaka, Counsellor of the Japanese Embassy, that there should be mutual cessation of military movements and withdrawal of both sides to their original positions, but Tokyo paid no attention to this proposal. A Japanese memorandum, presented at Nanking on July 17, warned China to suspend all hostile acts and not to obstruct a local settlement in the north. These were the central points in the diplomatic debate. In effect Japan was demanding, first, that the Chinese government refrain from sending troops into Hopei province, while offering no check on the dispatch of its own forces; and, second, that the Hopei-Chahar Political Council should be considered an independent government, in no way amenable to Nanking's jurisdiction. In reply to these demands the Chinese Foreign Office presented an aide-mémoire to the Japanese Embassy on July 19, containing the following counter-proposals: (1) joint fixing of a definite date on which both sides should simultaneously cease all military movements and withdraw their respective armed forces to the positions occupied prior to the incident; (2) settlement of the Lukouchiao incident through regular diplomatic channels; (3) questions of a local nature susceptible of adjustment on the spot should be subject to sanction of the National Government.²⁰

At Kuling, on the same day, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek issued his ringing proclamation to the nation, declaring that "China's sovereign rights cannot be sacrificed, even at the expense of

17. His predecessor, Lieutenant-General Tashiro, was seriously ill and died a few weeks later.

18. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 15, 1937.

19. Shuhsing Hsu, "The North China Crisis," *The China Quarterly* (Shanghai), Vol. 2, No. 4, Special Fall Number, 1937, p. 592.

20. For text, cf. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 21, 1937.

war, and once war has begun there is no looking back." In this address the Generalissimo laid down four points as the "minimum conditions" for a basis of negotiation:

"first, any kind of settlement must not infringe upon the territorial integrity and the sovereign rights of our nation; second, as the status of the Hopei-Chahar Political Council is fixed by the Central Government, we will not allow any illegal alterations; third, we will not agree to the removal by outside pressure of those local officials appointed by the Central Government, such as the Chairman of the Hopei-Chahar Political Council; fourth, we will not allow any restriction being placed upon the positions now held by the 29th Army."²¹

Japan's diplomatic pressure at Nanking was immediately intensified. The Japanese Military Attaché, Major-General Seiichi Kita, in the course of a talk with General Ho Ying-chin, Chinese War Minister, on the late afternoon of July 19, intimated that failure to remove the central troops from Hopei might aggravate the Sino-Japanese crisis, which was "rapidly approaching the final stage."²² Other reports described this interview as the Japanese Army's "last warning" to China.²³ On July 20, at an early morning session with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Hidaka stressed the demands previously raised by his government. Dr. Wang Chung-hui firmly countered both demands. If the legality of central troop movements in Hopei should be questioned, he declared, then it must be equally recognized that the presence there of a large Japanese army was an undoubted violation of the territorial and sovereign rights of China. As to the issue of local negotiations, he stated that in every country the conduct of foreign relations was reserved exclusively to the central government.²⁴ Since Mr. Hidaka refused to consider the proposals of the Chinese aide-mémoire, which Dr. Wang renewed in this conversation, the deadlock seemed complete.

To the very end, however, the Central Government kept open the possibility of a diplomatic settlement. The presence of central troops in Hopei was played up in Japan in order to rally popular support behind the militarists' aggressive plans. The *Domei* reports sent to Japan greatly exaggerated the number of these troops, which never exceeded two divisions during the month of July. Neither in Hopei nor Honan, moreover, did the mobilized divisions consist of first-class troops; the crack divisions were all kept at Nanking.

21. For text, cf. *North-China Daily News*, July 20, 1937.

22. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 21, 1937.

23. *North-China Daily News*, July 20, 1937.

24. *The China Press*, July 21, 1937.

Nor did the central authorities prejudice the attempts to reach a local settlement. The Nanking government, as previously noted, had ratified General Sung Che-yuan's acceptance of the July 11 agreement with the Japanese military; in so doing, it came perilously close to violating the four-point minimum enunciated by the Generalissimo. This, too, was of no avail; the blow fell with unrelenting rigor.

CLASHES AT LANGFANG AND PEIPIING

Left mainly to its own resources, the leadership of the 29th Route Army proved wholly unable to measure up to its task. Japan's military command was enabled to complete its preparations at leisure, and then to choose the moment to strike a paralyzing blow. The interlude of comparative peace which had followed the agreement of July 18-19 was rudely broken on the morning of July 26 by a sanguinary clash at Langfang. As usual, the incident which precipitated hostilities occurred during the previous night, and the details as published were presented in two contradictory versions.²⁵ After a brief clash shortly before midnight on July 25, hostilities apparently ceased. They were resumed at 3 a.m., when 1,300 Japanese reinforcements rushed from Tientsin launched an attack on the Chinese positions. At dawn seventeen Japanese airplanes reached Langfang and bombed the Chinese barracks severely, forcing the Chinese troops to withdraw.

This incident and other alleged provocations were made the grounds for an ultimatum addressed to General Sung Che-yuan by the Japanese Garrison Headquarters on July 26. Its terms read:

"If your army should have the intention not to make the situation more serious, the 37th Division stationed near Lukouchiao and Papaoshan should, first of all, be withdrawn as soon as possible before the noon of the 27th inst. to Changhsintien, and the 37th Division in Peiping, inclusive of the troops of the same Division at Hsiyuan, should be evacuated from the Peiping wall to the westward of the Yungtingho, through the area north of the Pinghan Railway, before the noon of the 28th inst., and the transportation of these troops to Paotingfu should be commenced immediately afterwards." In case of failure to carry out these demands, the ultimatum concluded, "the Japanese Army must, to its greatest regret, take its own decisive measures. Every responsibility incurred in this case ought to be taken by your army."²⁶

25. In the case of an incident that takes place late at night, it should be observed that, aside from the difficulty of checking up on the facts, the news does not reach the public until the second day after the event.

26. For text, cf. *The Peking and Tientsin Times*, July 27, 1937.

The Japanese command at once proceeded to change the disposition of its forces in the Peiping-Tientsin area. Special efforts were made to reinforce the Japanese Embassy Guard at Peiping. About 300 Japanese troops sought to enter the Chao Yang Men shortly after noon, but finding the gate closed marched around the city toward Fengtai. A similar effort in the evening led to a serious clash. Shortly before seven o'clock, about 500 Japanese troops arrived at the Kwang An Men from Lukouchiao in motor lorries and demanded admittance to the city. This force was accompanied by a Japanese adviser of the 29th Army, who explained to the Chinese guards that these Japanese soldiers belonged to the Embassy Guard. After a lengthy parley, about 120 of these troops were allowed to enter, but as soon as they had passed through the gate, the Japanese forces outside opened fire with machine-guns and field artillery. The guards immediately closed the gate, and soon a brisk exchange of fire developed. Intermittent firing continued until nearly midnight, when an agreement was effected which permitted the Japanese troops inside the city to proceed to the Embassy barracks.

The crisis precipitated by the clashes at Langfang and Peiping, and by the Japanese ultimatum, found the leaders of the 29th Route Army still unprepared for resolute action. July 27, the day on which the first clause of the ultimatum expired, saw General Sung Che-yuan attempting to arrange a compromise with the Japanese military authorities. He apparently offered to withdraw the troops of the 37th Division, as demanded, but sought to have these replaced with the 132nd Division. This offer the Japanese rejected, since the ultimatum clearly aimed at evacuation of all Chinese troops, i.e., demilitarization of the Peiping area. When convinced that the Japanese would brook nothing less, General Sung finally broke off negotiations. In the evening he issued a circular telegram to the country expressing his determination to defend national territory against aggression. Fighting had already begun that afternoon south of the Nanyuan barracks. There could be no further doubt that a major struggle was impending. At this zero hour, no offensive operations were ordered by the Chinese command; the bulk of the Chinese troops were not even deployed for action in the surrounding territory, but were left in their barracks at Nanyuan, Peiyuan, and to a lesser extent at Hsiyuan.

Large-scale operations began early on July 28. A proclamation issued by Lieutenant-General Katsuki, commander of the North China Garrison, and distributed by military aircraft at dawn,

stated that the Japanese Army had decided "to launch a punitive expedition against the Chinese troops, who have been taking acts derogatory to the prestige of the Empire of Japan."²⁷ Bringing aircraft and heavy artillery into action, the Japanese forces attacked the 29th Army at all points in the Peiping sector, except the city itself. Most of the Chinese troops had evacuated the Hsiyuan barracks, where relatively small casualties were reported. Concentrations of Chinese troops were dispersed at Peiyuan. The most severe attack was directed against Nanyuan, which contained the largest concentration of Chinese troops in the neighborhood of Peiping. Here the debacle was complete. Driven from their barracks by a severe airplane bombardment, the Chinese troops withdrew down the near-by roads, where they were slaughtered by machine-gun fire from the air. Chinese casualties in this sector numbered several thousand, including the deaths of General Chao Teng-yu, commander of the 132nd Division, and his vice-commander, General Tung Lin-kuo.

That night the high commanders of the 29th Army left for Paotingfu. Following the departure of their leaders, the troops of the 37th and 38th Divisions within Peiping also evacuated. From midnight of July 28 until four o'clock the next morning, a continuous stream of motor lorries and trucks laden with Chinese soldiers passed out of the city gates. Many of these troops had been manning the defences in various parts of the city throughout the preceding day and night, and "when word was passed round to them that they had been ordered to leave their defences and evacuate the city, they cried bitterly."²⁸

TUNGCHOW AND TIENSIN

Up to this point, the Japanese operations had proceeded entirely according to schedule. Two surprises were in store, one at Tungchow and the other at Tientsin. Reference to the background and origins of the East Hopei *Paoantui* throws considerable light on the macabre features of the mutiny at Tungchow. The Tangku Truce of May 31, 1933 had specified that a Chinese gendarmerie should police the demilitarized zone of East Hopei. For some months the Japanese military prevented the organization or functioning of such a Chinese police force. During this period the demilitarized zone was overrun by semi-bandit irregulars, whose depredations kept the area in turmoil. On Japanese insistence, these irregulars were incorporated in the Chinese gendarmerie

27. *The Peiping Chronicle*, July 29, 1937.

28. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1937.

eventually organized to police the demilitarized zone. After formation of the East Hopei Autonomous Government under Yin Ju-keng in November 1935, four *Paoantui* corps, the basic stock of which was still the former semi-bandit elements, were created. For a year the resident Japanese Military Mission at Tungchow had devoted careful efforts to the training of the East Hopei *Paoantui*, and apparently had implicit confidence in the loyalty of this Chinese force, despite its questionable background.

A characteristic incident supplied the prelude to the revolt. Tungchow was located on the extreme southern edge of the East Hopei régime's territory. A battalion of the 38th Division of the 29th Army was stationed at the south gate of the city. Despite its precarious position, this battalion had received no orders to evacuate when the Lukouchiao incident developed. It kept its post even after the East Hopei *Paoantui* were ordered to surround it in a semi-circle, hemming it in against the city wall. On July 28 the Japanese troops opened fire on the battalion from the gate and wall with trench mortars and machine-guns. Facing complete annihilation, this Chinese force escaped only because the *Paoantui* seem to have let it through; total casualties, so far as could be discovered, were 18 killed and 18 wounded. The main body withdrew safely, but was later pursued by the bulk of the Japanese garrison at Tungchow, of which only forty-three officers and men were left behind. The resulting situation proved too great a temptation for the *Paoantui*, who mutinied on the morning of July 29. Loot evidently bulked largest in their minds, with revenge against the Japanese as a possible secondary motive.²⁹

No extra precautions seem to have been taken by the small Japanese force left at Tungchow. Awakened by the sound of rifle fire at three o'clock, the garrison found that the mutineers had completely surrounded the mud walls of its barracks. This attack was never pushed home, despite the overwhelming disparity of numbers. The greater part of the *Paoantui* indulged in an orgy of looting and massacre, with civilian Japanese and Korean residents as the main object of attack. Several Japanese planes bombed the city in the afternoon; the bombardment started a stream of Chinese refugees, numbering nearly ten thousand, flowing into the mission compounds. Seven more planes appeared over Tungchow on the following morning and engaged in a two-hour bombard-

ment. At four o'clock that afternoon a relief detachment of Japanese troops reached the scene; by dark this force had mopped up most of the *Paoantui* still in the city and gained control of the gates. Twenty of the Japanese garrison were killed and thirteen wounded. Five officers and associates of the Japanese Military Mission escaped; eleven were killed. Of 385 Japanese and Korean residents, there were only 135 survivors. Chinese casualties, including civilians killed or wounded during the bombardments, were estimated at approximately one thousand.

The outbreak at Tientsin, which exactly paralleled the Tungchow mutiny in point of time, was wholly different in character. Again the Chinese forces consisted of a few thousand *Paoantui*, but they fought against heavy odds in equipment if not in numbers. At two o'clock on the morning of July 29, the *Paoantui* opened vigorous attack on a series of carefully chosen military objectives. They captured the Peitsang Station north of Tientsin; occupied the West and Central Stations in the city, overcoming small Japanese garrisons in each case; and laid siege to the East Station. Another Chinese detachment moved rapidly against one of the Japanese airfields, where some forty planes were resting on the ground. Warned in time, the planes took to the air and bombed and machine-gunned the Chinese troops as they approached the field. Success in this enterprise, despite the fact that other Japanese planes were within striking distance, might have prolonged the struggle in Tientsin. Failure sealed the fate of the attack.

During the morning, nevertheless, the Japanese position was extremely critical. The *Paoantui* commanded the International Bridge and its approaches, concentrating a heavy fire on all Japanese military traffic attempting to proceed to the East Station. Two of the three main stations were occupied, and a struggle of serious proportions was occurring at the third. The Japanese garrison at East Station was cut off, and the Japanese Concession was isolated. All ground connections between the airfield under attack and the East Arsenal were broken. The bulk of the Japanese troops had gone inland toward Peiping, where they were fully occupied. Resort was had to the air force.

Bombing planes, sent up in the early afternoon, loosed destruction on the city. By nightfall many of the principal Chinese public buildings were smoldering ruins; at Nankai University the Library and the Science Building withstood destruction but the Administration Building, with its wooden floors, windows and seats, was burned

29. The details of this paragraph are taken from an eyewitness account, summarized editorially in *The Peking and Tientsin Times* for August 14, 1937.

to the ground. East Station, where the Japanese garrison was relieved late on the night of July 29, was carefully spared. That night the *Paoantui* were blasted from their positions by rifle fire, machine-guns and trench mortars, operating in concerted offensive. On the next morning there was a lull, broken only by an occasional shot. The critical period had already passed. The main forces of the *Paoantui* were evacuating the city, and Japanese patrols began to move about more freely.

Tension was renewed in the afternoon when another intensive bombing operation, chiefly affecting Chinese institutions, was carried out. Incendiary bombs, dropped in the area of the Hui Wen Academy and the Nankai Middle and Girls' Schools, started a fire which was fanned by a stiff breeze and spread rapidly. The destruction of Nankai University was completed. Parties of Japanese troops, sent out in trucks carrying supplies of oil, "set fire to the trees and brushwood all round the campus. The wind took the flames in the direction of the buildings. Then artillery opened up on the concrete buildings which had escaped the fire from the incendiary bombs. The campus was soon a mass of flames and the surrounding countryside, together with the adjoining premises, were involved in the conflagration."³⁰

Clouds and occasional heavy rains on the morning of July 31 promised an end to the anarchy and destruction that had ruled Tientsin for forty-eight hours. All signs of Chinese opposition, save for infrequent sniping, had virtually ceased. The severest measure of the punitive campaign was reserved for that afternoon. A heavy artillery bombardment of several districts in the Chinese city began soon after three o'clock, and lasted continuously until nightfall. The shelling virtually wiped out the old Boxer villages near the Central Station; until well into the night, the huts of the Chinese villagers in this area blazed fiercely. Panic-stricken residents made a wholesale exodus from many areas, particularly the mud-hut villages, which were almost completely destroyed. Since thirty thousand refugees were already crowded into the British Concession, it proved necessary to direct this new stream along the British Bund into the First Special Area; it was estimated that nearly forty thousand refugees passed along the British Bund on the afternoon and evening of this day. Crowds of onlookers along the Bund were deeply moved by the long line of refugees, which consisted largely of careworn and exhausted women

30. *The Peking and Tientsin Times*, July 31, 1937.

and children. The Japanese military spokesman later claimed that the bombardment was necessitated by the presence of anti-Japanese elements in the Chinese district, which could not be driven out by other means. To many, however, it appeared that this measure could not be justified by any military objective; its chief effect was to terrorize the Chinese civilian population of Tientsin.

CONCLUSION

With the defeat of the *Paoantui* at Tientsin, the curtain was drawn over the last act of hostilities in the Peiping-Tientsin area. The fighting at Tientsin had demonstrated what might have been accomplished by the Chinese troops under more determined leadership. At the end of July there were some forty or forty-five thousand Chinese soldiers in the Peiping-Tientsin area; the total Japanese force amounted to approximately thirty-two thousand men. Given the superior mechanical equipment, especially the air power, of the latter, the ultimate issue could hardly be in doubt. Yet it is certain that coordinated military action by the Chinese forces, especially in the form of well-conceived offensive operations, would have made the whole enterprise vastly more costly for the Japanese. Even if the various units of the 29th Army had merely been ordered to attack the nearest Japanese detachment at will, they would have given a different account of themselves, in the opinion of most informed observers in North China. That order was never given.

In this fact lies the clearest evidence of Japanese aggression. The mind of the 29th Army's high command was an open book to the Japanese military. They knew well that there was no real military threat to Japanese interests in North China, save of their own making. They chose to create such a threat. The line thus thrown out from China was immediately caught and held in Japan. The speed with which the Tokyo authorities expanded the Lukouchiao incident into a *casus belli* admits of but one interpretation. Three days after the early morning hostilities at Wanping, the Cabinet had taken all necessary steps to secure mobilization of the army, evacuation of Japanese nationals from China, and regimentation of public opinion at home. The scope of these measures, no less than the rapidity with which they were put into effect, suggests the operation of a well-oiled machine which needed only to be thrown into gear at a given signal.